

# ENGLAND'S GARLAND

GEORGE BARTRAM

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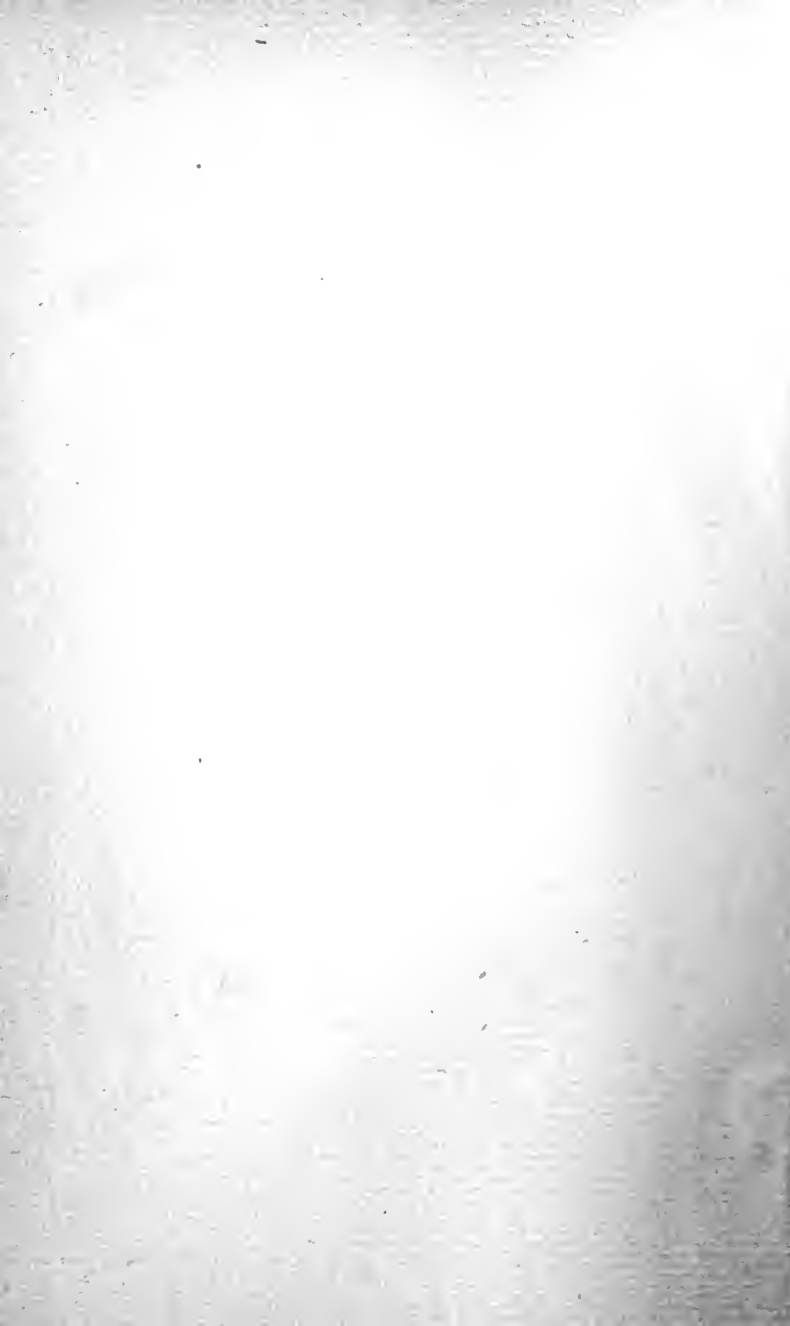
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## ENGLAND'S GARLAND



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# ENGLAND'S GARLAND

BY

GEORGE BARTRAM

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

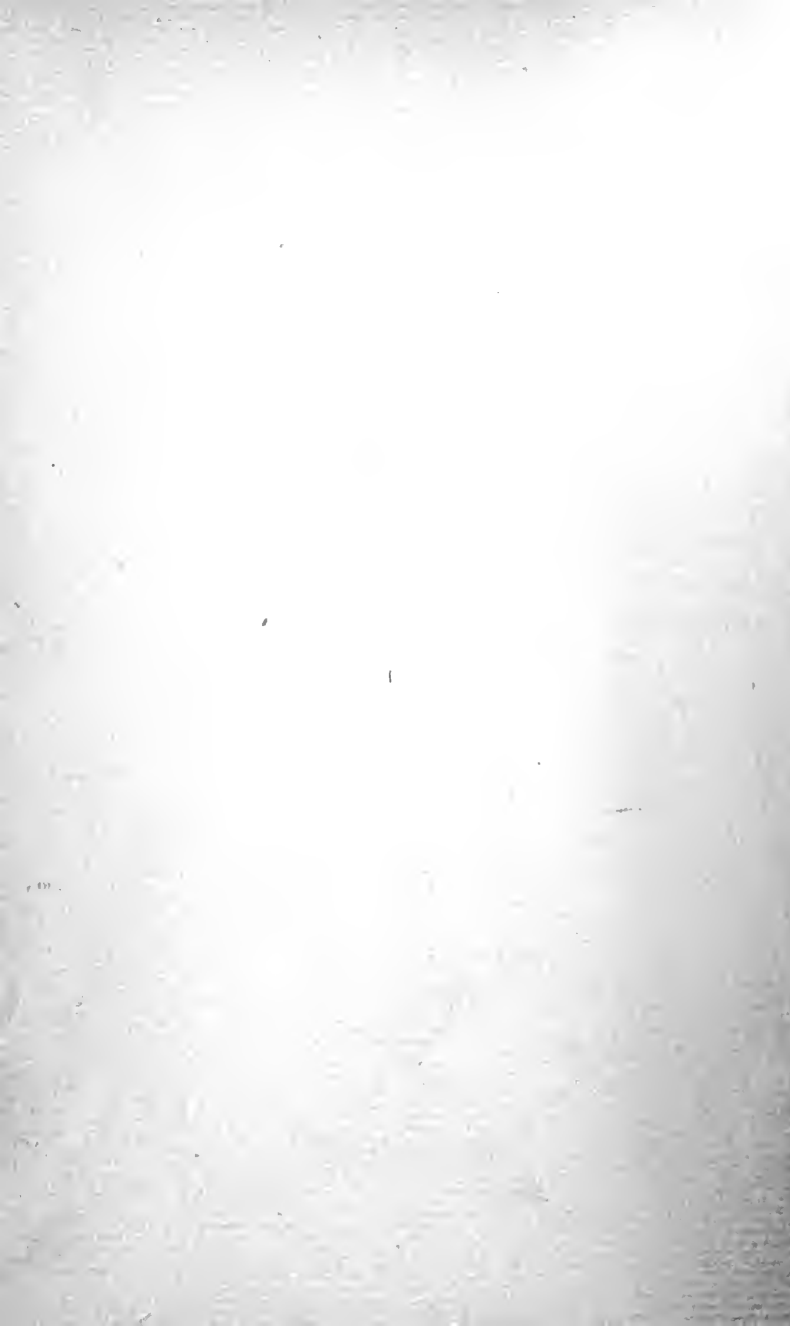
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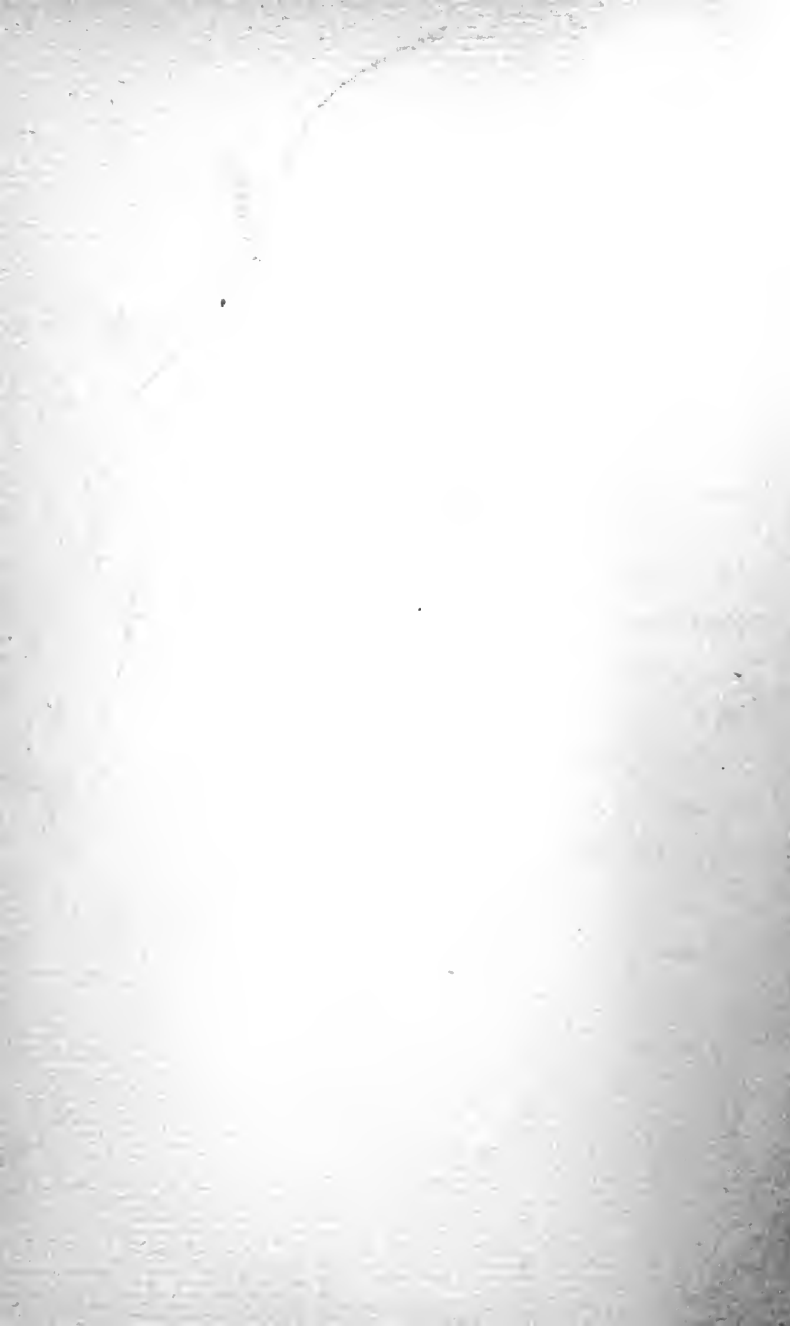
DEDICATED  
TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
GEORGE BORROW

602534



LITTLE can be said for these verses, except that they have been composed afield, in that abiding-place of beauty and romance, the remoter South of England.

G. B.



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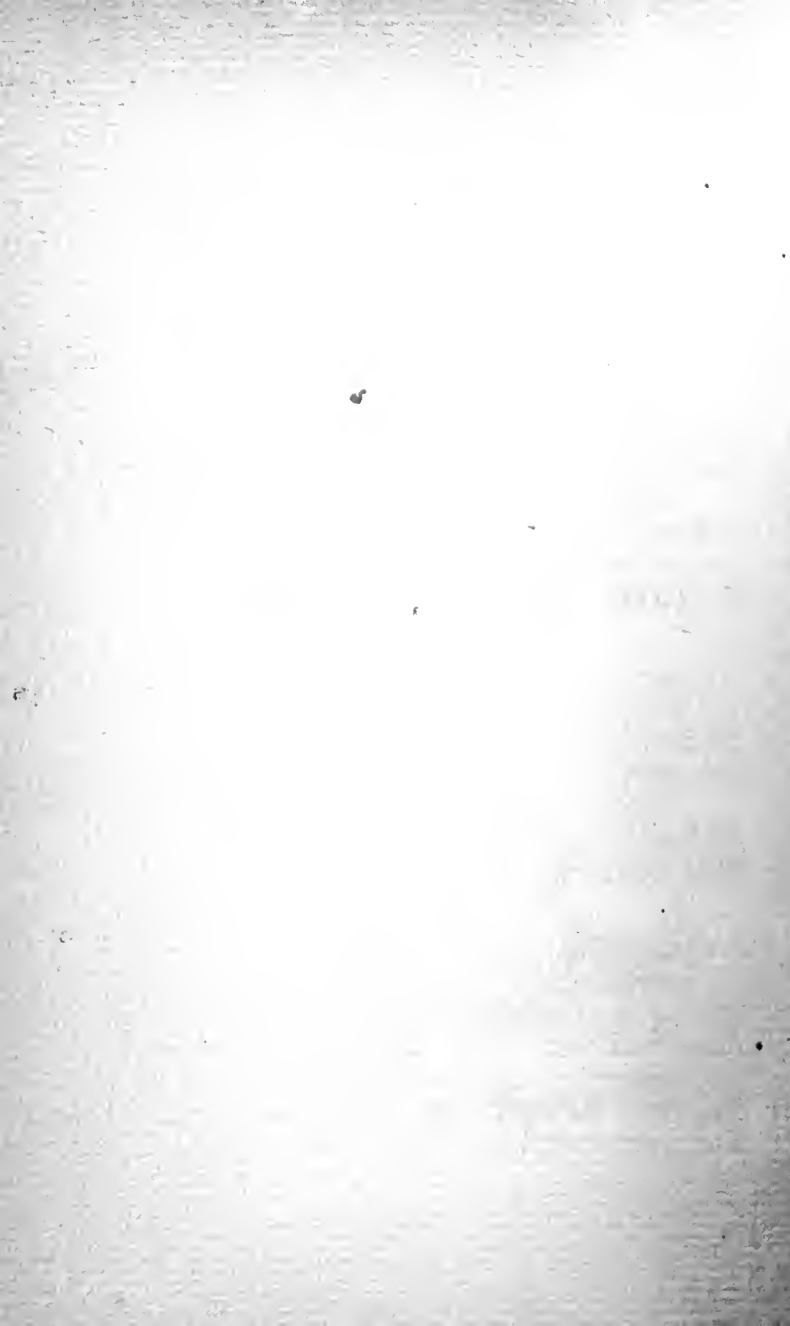
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# THE GREEN GATEWAY



## THE GREEN GATEWAY

BIG tears of Night bespangle blade and leaf,  
And lover-like the dawn-breeze prompteth  
me :

“ Rise, captive, rid thee of thy load of grief,  
Quit thy grey dungeon, and secure relief  
In yon green space that soon no more may be.

“ Haste, hie thee fieldward, and endow thy  
breast

With airs of summer, whose ambrosial kiss,  
Of warm South blended and of wayward  
West,

Of balm of woodland and the briny zest,  
Shall steep thy spirit in the olden bliss.

“ Though Grief's chill sighs thy temples have  
blown bare,

And made thy manhood subject of their spoil,  
Deep rest and solace steadfast wait thee  
there ;

Still glows the maid's cheek in the upland air ;  
The greenwood lingers in the Land of Toil.

“ Though terror travels in a dusty cloud  
Upon the roadway, there is bliss anigh :  
With silent alleys are the woods endowed :  
With daisied carpets are the uplands proud :  
The lark still carols in a maiden sky.”

A pilgrim I, by the foul city's care  
Much worn, much wasted by an inward woe :  
Whose eyes, so often on his griefs astare,  
Now droop devoutly as the eyes of prayer,  
And with their briny burden overflow.

Ay, I am even as the wretch new quit  
Of dreadful durance or extremest pain,  
Whose banished griefs like peering spectres yet  
Around the portals of his fancy flit,  
The swifter circling that they strive in vain.

A riband winding o'er wide slopes of green,  
A breeze from southward, overhead serene,  
Spacious, and cloudless, southern England's  
sky ;

Not long the Terror that in darkness stalks  
 Shall vex his spirit who devoutly walks  
 This blithesome way, remote exceedingly.

Awake, good Fate, for me and this within  
 me,  
 In that sweet future which my hopes perpend,  
 Long spells of solace that shall genius win  
 me,  
 As, nerved and sanguine, southward still I  
 wend :

Clear thoughts—brisk banishers of cloudy  
 dulness,  
 Strong zest of palate, man-beseeming mould,  
 Fleet step elastic, be ye mine in fulness,  
 Through one deep draught at the rich breast  
 of old !

Green England, gracious wielder of the spell  
 Of pastoral beauty, janitress benign  
 Of blest Arcadian temples, matron-belle  
 Robed rich of rustic glories, it is well,  
 Yea, past all boasting, to be son of thine !

Remain green England, and grow rich with  
store

Of peasant manhood, sow thou plenteous seed  
Of such grim valour as was thine of yore ;  
Be thine endowments aye and evermore  
The bowering woodland and the wind-swept  
mead.

Now did I crave, as comrade close of mine,  
This goodly morn, in my glad way afield,  
Some sun-scorched ancient tender of the vine,  
Whose classic jingles of his own stored wine,  
His own pressed olives, gust and odour yield.

Or some brave bard of the Provençal throng,  
Some errant quirist of the Gallic grove,  
To witch my journey these green wilds among  
With tale romantic and with amorous song,  
E'en as of old, in his own land of love :—

Or some strong by-blow of thine own rich yore,  
Great Queen maternal, of that royal time  
When fresh young Freedom was thy paramour,  
Thy nurse old Nature, and there nestled store  
Of noble bantlings in thy lap sublime :—

'Twere no presumption ; surely on this day  
The silent sweetness of Elysium palls,  
Rare Will is wistful of the old-time May,  
Mad Kit runs over with some random lay  
Of posy-beds and thrush-quired madrigals :—

And he, the brown bard, musing as he goes  
Of uplands scented with the thorny bine,  
Would sell Elysium for one southern rose,  
And Earth's sworn Roman in his crooked  
    nose  
Finds leathery odours of the skins of wine.

But since the stretches of that magic sea,  
That none retraceth, the fond wish with-  
    stand,  
Be this my comfort, joy is back with me,  
Be mine own self mine own brave company,  
So hey the footpath, and the good green  
    land!

In this brown wallet at my hip I bear a thing  
    of worth,  
An ancient flask ; its womb is charged with  
    germ of rime and mirth :  
The noblest yield of southern vats is this  
    brown wine of Spain :

And, as I mount the wide green slope, again  
    and yet again  
A joyous spirit whispers me, "When yon  
    round knoll is won,  
Let this gay vintage of the South flow  
    spangling in the sun !"

Full well I know that sward and sky, and all  
good things that be,  
Shall build a nest of golden rime within the  
brain of me,  
When its dull coils the grape's rich juice hath  
moistened and set free.

Aye when I gloat on England's charms, and  
taste this lordly wine,  
The radiant-browed Poetic Muse is paramour  
of mine,  
And greets me, from her gorgeous throne,  
with courtesies benign.

In this fair summit towering from the dale  
The sylvan county closest gains to heaven,  
Yet shrouded oft, when southern winds prevail,  
In floating mists that on the green crest trail  
Their curtains vague, by pallid sunlight riven.

All naked now the lustrous sky is spread ;  
Waned to a star, as dwindling with the glow  
Of torrid fervour by his strong beams shed,  
The noon's fierce Soldan lords it overhead ;  
Half hid in haze the valley lies below.



The hill's smooth skirt in every classic fold  
Is velvet green, the summit of the swell  
Green velvet intertangled with pale gold,  
Sun-sprinkled pile of firmest texture, rolled  
In waves of splendour indescribable.

The glorious hill is lined with stunted trees  
And scented thorn, its shoulders wide beneath,  
Up here bright void is, and the western breeze  
Bears wayward witness of brine-laden seas  
Adjacent, with each soul-inspiring breath.

Right fair the prospect from the pillow soft  
Of gracious verdure, whence in flight serene  
Glad Vision turns her from the blue aloft  
To goodly pasture and sun-gilded croft,  
O'er fern-clad dingle and embowered ravine.

Ten wondrous minutes hath a skylark hung  
A bowshot o'er me, swaying in the glow :  
All Earth was captive of his thrilling tongue ;  
Now he dives past me in full stream of song  
To that mute partner in the green below.

Gone, gone from sight ! Now Heaven and  
Earth are free  
Of his strong pipe, yet, hark, each dappled  
throat  
Of far below awakes in bush and tree ;  
The deep dale teems with drowseful melody—  
Faint minor chords, soul-searching strains  
remote.

Low o'er the summit, like a wildered soul,  
His tiny form the reckless swallow flings,  
Relentless-urgent of his insect toll :  
Alive around me seems the sunlit knoll  
With whispers uttered by his arrowy wings.

Swift-whirling vagrant, though the bitter  
    scathe  
Await thee sure of winter or of sea,  
Bode not the salt whelm or the frost's keen  
    breath,  
The old wild foray shall taste warm in death,  
The old joy relish when the end shall be.

Fair shire, embordered by the narrow sea,  
In one brave bumper I conjoin with thee  
Thy comely sister, celebrate of old,  
The land of cherries and the wreathing bine,  
O'er whose broad bosom in a maze divine  
The branching byways wander uncontrolled.

And ah, that magic powers were granted me  
To call the tune and choose the company,  
To summon echoes of the old refrain  
That with mysterious memories enspells  
And faery visions, or the far-off strain  
Of chanting children and of village bells.

Or that blithe bugles from the dale below  
One glorious challenge to the skies would  
    throw,  
Then should come hither, ah, the goodly rout !  
Then this lined vessel were a tertian stout,  
And this poor goblet were a tankard tall,  
A giant's flagon, and of gold withal !

Right welcome, ancient cloaked and bonneted,  
Whose daily pitcher was of Gascon red :  
Drink, till the leakage gilds thy whisker hoar,  
And tell the tapster if in days of yore,  
When thou wert keeper of the counter-roll,  
The sovran Butler could such treasure toll.

Thy hand, strong forger of the wondrous line,  
Who in thy regal garland didst entwine  
With Faustus' dire damnation magic sleights  
Of rural charms and pastoral delights :  
Come, drink, this vintage of the gods excels  
The Mermaid's malvoisies and muscadels.

Thou, amorous hermit, who so oft of old  
In thy sweet verses blithely hast enrolled  
The loves and graces of rurality,  
I fill a flagon to the brim for thee :  
Come, drink, thou wert not eager to dispraise  
The vine's rich bounty, in thy mortal days.

Thou, whose keen pen with many a bitter gibe  
Did pierce and slash the sycophantic tribe  
Of opportunists, there were hours a few  
When ruddy Ceres did thy soul renew  
To cheerfuller distractions, blither whim ;  
Thrice welcome, Andrew—bumpers to the  
brim !

Loud-wrangling tribune, lay aside thy mask  
Of strenuous challenge, couch thee nigh the  
cask :

In thy brief leisure, thou of old didst glean  
Full sheaves of rapture in this fair demesne :  
A potent sacrament, right blest the wine,  
That tips with honey such a tongue as thine.

And thou, tall roamer of green path and  
lane,

Who, that she viewed thee with profound  
disdain,

Held thy great purblind Mother but more  
dear :

Most wondrous vagrant, gypsy chevalier,  
Vain juggling this, mere moonshine mockery,  
Were no mossed cushion and rich cup for  
thee !

Come, drink, the tertian sheds a stream of  
gold,

And I will tend ye as a slave of old,

Till this plump cask hath yielded all its wine,  
And yon steep sun doth o'er the slopes  
decline :

Come, drink, I serve on blithely-bended knee,  
And your rare lispings my reward shall be.

The flask is empty : I have slumbered long :  
The white moon stares across the shadowed  
vale :

The West has wilted unto orange pale :  
Gone be the goodly lords of prose and song.

And all they uttered has become a chain  
Of vagrant echoes, that inconstant pass,  
As flow the zephyrs through the yielding grass,  
Amid the channels of my drowsy brain.

There was a precept : that I could recall  
Its purport solemn ! (Those the lords of men  
Shall never visit my starved soul again)  
And benediction bounteous withal.

Oh, yield not this that stirs thy sanguine heart,  
To the dull rabble's shallow scrutiny :  
That jaded tribe can have no part with thee,  
Thy thorn-fenced nosegays, or thy rugged art.

Seek thou no welcome from that alien crew,  
Leave thy poor posy to the cautious test  
Of English only, yet of England's best :  
The tardy verdict of the royal few.

See that thy bantling wear a sober dress—  
Good English homespun of the ancient time,  
For much that masketh it as modern rime  
Is tangled fustian, utter weariness.

Snatch thou from yore the stout simplicities  
And humours strange (then England but  
drew breath  
By love of life and valiant scorn of death),  
Be thy quaint garland woven all of these.

## STUDIES





## PRELUDE

OH, I have journeyed many a mile on paths  
beset by ditch and stile,  
And never once the long lone way my fiddle  
from its threadbare sheath  
Made manumit by night or day, but hugged  
it close mine arm beneath.

And when I came to yonder town I would  
not strive to win renown  
In that uncouth and public spot where stand  
the minstrels all arow,  
While none that passeth heeds a jot whether  
the minstrels play or no.

It is not good that place to haunt, to view  
those minstrels wan and gaunt,  
Those sad-eyed harvesters of scorn, who in  
the end forbear to play,  
And on the hungry rocks forlorn their withered  
bodies cast away.

But now that I have come to what I deem a  
rare and princely spot,  
Where every porch is draped with flowers,  
and all the land is fair to see,  
Methinks amid such radiant bowers the  
audience of my heart may be.

And here for one blithe hour or so I will  
employ the strings and bow :  
Do thou, sweet mistress blue-bedight, and  
thou, old master tall and grey,  
And thou, young shapely-shouldered wight,  
sit in the sun and hear me play.

And be not shamed such grace to grant for  
that of number ye be scant ;  
Nought doth my spirit more rejoice, for I am  
one of curious mood,  
Than listeners few and grave and choice—an  
audience all of English blood.

And marvel not that when I play my strum-  
ming fingers madly stray,  
And like a charging trooper's blade mine  
elbow darteth to and fro :  
They who afield acquire the trade do ever  
thus with strings and bow.

The tunes I play do every one in quaint and  
rapid measures run :  
Such is the true old English way—a winding  
flood that travels free :  
God send it please ye, gentles gay, as doth  
the rendering gladden me.

And all were spun in secret hour beside the  
solemn lichen'd tower,  
The ivy-spangled keep that still of England's  
eld is seneschal—  
That standeth staunch and ever will, and  
green its twining scarves withal.

List, lovers all of England's yore ; the  
pointer of the dial hoar  
Spells noon ; the arboured walks be strown  
with eyliads from the god of day ;  
And when I have my garland shown I'll  
bless you all and go my way.

## TWILIGHT

(1399)

WHEN moonless Night hath over Earth's  
fair face  
Her spell serene of magic veiling wound,  
And gathered to her in a fond embrace  
Sweet Silence, partner steadfast and profound,  
I sit alone beneath the knotted yew,  
And all the phases of my life review.

Of old I travelled o'er the wailing seas  
On secret mission, eager to fulfil  
For high advancement and my future ease  
The wild vagaries of a bungler's will :  
Right hard the service, goodly seemed the  
gains,  
And but experience in the end remains.

Full oft this maxim had my hopes renewed,  
" When all is empty that my hands can toll,  
When I all phases of this life have viewed,  
And in rich numbers have revealed my soul,  
And Fame has dowered me in deserved  
degree,  
Some English Eden shall my refuge be.

“Some den of comfort in a shire serene,  
Some ancient manor that my lord shall give  
To keep the garland of remembrance green  
In his slave’s soul, so long as he may live :  
There will I solace me, till Age’s breath  
Shall waft me smoothly to the arms of Death.”

Yet all the treasures that in turn were mine  
Did no staunch comfort to my bosom bring :  
The joy of scheming, and the gust of wine,  
The maid’s fond signal, and the scented wing  
Of Fame that fanned me, and the spoils of lore,  
Did leave me barren as I was before.

Alack, the profit that mine end doth hold !  
My garish honours and my goodly hoards,  
My curious trinkets and my chains of gold,  
My scrolls emblazoned and my jewelled  
swords,  
Grey Usance hath devoured them, and bereft  
I stand, with nothing but clear wisdom left.

With this calm corner of the monks’ domain  
I have no quarrel, yet in many a spell  
Of moody musing do the trick obtain,  
When fails the rushlight in my lowly cell,  
And lies the pageant of my past unrolled,  
Of heaping curses on the ways of old.

Full oft I wonder, as I sit alone  
In dreamy ambush, why I strove so long  
To keep in safety on his trembling throne  
That shallow weaver of chicane and wrong,  
Who paid the champions of his hollow state  
With barren pledges and a weakling's hate.

And thou, sly baldhead of the wintry veins,  
Most perfect schemer, Paduan complete,  
Who sucked the treasure of my fevered  
    brains,  
As tugs the urchin at the swollen teat,  
For thy glib management of treachery  
The pang of Naples in the bones of thee !

And ye, fair serpents, that did wind and  
    weave  
In fatal sequence through mine ardent soul,  
Who did my heart of rosy trust bereave,  
And my poor coffers at your pleasure toll,  
Your arts upon ye, ye were—

—Old tyke, that sittest blowing bubbles  
Of vanished pains and phantom troubles,  
Which is but wittol-wise, I trow,  
Amend, shake off thy dotard's burden,  
Remind thee of the golden guerdon  
Of the strong calm that waits thee now.

The solace won by sapient capture  
 Of museful joys, the godly rapture  
 Of studious days and toils serene :  
 Seal firm the shrine of old abuses ;  
 The heart is put to paltry uses  
 That hugs the torments that have been.

What wouldest ? Pish, thy day is over ;  
 Hoar sixty makes a barren lover ;  
 That blissful pang shall come no mo :  
 What then ? Be blithe, and bless the lovers,  
 When cheek to cheek through brambly covers  
 Thou viewest Giles and Gillian go.

What would'st ? When sudden pangs remind  
 thee  
 That some near winter's grip may bind thee  
 With groaning penances forlorn,  
 Some wight shall still the bar be whirling,  
 Some green resound with staff and hurling,  
 Some springal leap the wattled thorn.

And when to view yon turret plainly  
 At bowshot range thou strivest vainly,  
 So narrowed is thy vision's marge,  
 Be blithe that harvest even neareth,  
 When in the lustrous sky appeareth  
 The full moon like a golden targe.

Though thine no more those chords of wonder  
That wail and die and wake and thunder  
Neath pillared roof of foreign fane,  
Take heart, fair Fortune better bringeth,  
The mottled starling blithely singeth  
At early morn from chapel vane.

No more that thrill the full veins stirring,  
When pikes be lodged and arrows whirring,  
And locks the hand on hilt withal :  
What then? The old man's blood shall  
    rally,  
When breezes through the cloisters sally,  
And tempests moan in turret tall.

Far fled the gauds of silk and sable,  
The bounties of the royal table,  
The footstool red and broidered chair,  
Yet Boniface of corner tavern  
Hath rare old ale in cobwebbed cavern,  
Deep down beneath the carven stair.

Take heart, old tyke, the happy liver  
Forgets the fearsome past forever,  
And fondly hugs the bliss at hand :  
Console thee with thine own brave stories  
Of taverns rare, and rustic glories,  
And Beauty's reign o'er English land !



## THE RANTING PILGRIM

(1591)

OLD Canterbury, many a grace benign  
Thou ownest, lureful to the soul of me :  
Right choice the vintage of thy cellared wine,  
Red-ripe the lips of thy warm maidens be,  
In gabled Mitre guarded welcome waits  
Mad Marlowe's entry, yet thy classic gates  
No more restrain me : lo, I ride afield—  
Afield and westward by the Pilgrim's Way :  
The dawn doth kindle, and the bloom of May  
Askance salutes me from the bosky Weald.

A vision lures me of old Fish Street Hill ;  
The rugged Boar displays his savage jowl,  
The blood-red Cock a-tiptoe trumpets still,  
The Black Friar's Head obtrudes from dusky  
cowl :

All, staring steadfast to the eastern skies,  
The Pilgrim's advent wait with hungry eyes,  
But chiefly she his coming shall acclaim,  
The winsome wanton plump and azure-eyed  
That naked sits the amorous foam beside,  
Smoothing her locks, with spangling gold  
aflame.

And yet 'tis wonder that the spell should lure  
Me townward, for the Gascon wine I bear  
In leathern cincture at my knee secure  
Is wine much better that the Masters share  
In choicest conclave : certain folk avow  
That certain Masters, woful bald of brow,  
Are star-crowned oracles : I disagree :  
I am a wayward mortal, and as such  
My worldly instinct doth not favour much  
Sententious rhymers who disparage me.

Still, I may travel townward : I have grown  
A little weary of the rustic way :  
The rustic wit, as doth the steadfast stone,  
Wears moss above, below is utter clay :  
What boots it dipping in the Mitre's bowl  
When each stout comrade hath an empty  
poll ?  
And yet, how wanton is the woodland rose !  
Sweet Nature whispers, "Keep to Pilgrim's  
Lane  
The livelong summer, and more wisdom gain  
In self-communion than loud London knows."

This portly partner in the leathern case,  
This bosom friend, my most familiar thrall  
And kindred sprite, doth dangle out of place,  
And needs some tendance ere he slip and fall,  
Some little easement of the bubbling load  
In his round carcase at the Mitre stowed :

A pledge! I drink unto this rosy morn,  
 To yon wide vale with rural charms besprent,  
 To all the beauties of the land of Kent,  
 To thee, Kit Marlowe, Kentish-bred-and-  
 born!

Come, weave within me faery visions bright,  
 Strong heart's-blood of the purple must, that  
 still

Art more than Woman my fond soul's delight:  
 Oh, regal spell, that spurrest my vain will  
 To lightning fancies, sudden toils that seem  
 Mad feats and wondrous, in a raptured dream  
 Done but for doing's sake, most subtle Wine,  
 My brain's wild being, as the circling motes  
 In noon-spun ether, willy-nilly floats  
 On thy red ripples in a maze divine!

Sure, I was in thy burning clutch conceived,  
 And drank thee with my mother's milk, or  
 ne'er

Hadst thou so many languid hours relieved  
 With thy keen strokes of magic: even here  
 Thy ruddy thralls surround me, tankards rise  
 In circle brandished, and my swimming eyes  
 Do round puffed cheeks on either hand behold,  
 By sweet suffusion captured: voices cry,  
 "A speech, mad Marlowe! Ere our lips be  
 dry,  
 The drunken wisdom of thy brain unfold!"

Ho, ho ! Ho, ho ! The treasured tertians  
fine

That sheering caracks o'er the Channel bring !  
A noble flavour hath the Gascon wine,  
Yet, when my fancy needs a subtle sting,  
A riper talisman shall intervene—  
The gracious malmsey from the isles serene,  
Most delicate, exceeding mystical :  
Yet, when brown magic can redeem no more,  
I solace find in flagons running o'er  
With purple vintages of Portugal.

My tongue doth stumble, and full vigour lacks  
The drinker's secret truthfully to tell,  
The dulcet odours of the Spanish sacks,  
The cloying flavours of sweet muscadel,  
The bounties pure from woodland grapes  
express

In bowering Eshcol, that disciples blest  
Of old did mingle for the Seer divine :  
Attend, blithe toppers, to a maxim sound  
From one in whom mad wisdom doth abound :  
By ruddy Bacchus, there is no bad wine !

All wine is worthy, yet good drinkers say  
That certain vintages superior be  
To the remainder : I would tell straightway  
What sort the better doth consort with me,  
But setting forth unto this phantom throng  
Such learned matters, taketh overlong :

The drouth of Dives doth my lips enthrall :  
 A toast, brave spirits ! Sure, the grape's rich  
     blood  
 Can yield no ill : the worst of wine is good,  
 The wine last tasted is the best of all !

Good faith, that mighty draught hath set the  
     brain  
 Like a scourged top a-humming in my pate :  
 My sweet familiar, thy hot spells restrain :  
 Adjourn the conclave to some distant date,  
 And drive afar yon Bacchanals that surge  
 In frantic mazes round me : bid them merge  
 In air and woodland : I would be alone—  
 —Alone a season with the steadfast thing  
 That mutters deep within me—would be king  
 For one brief hour of that which is mine own !

I know them all, grave Chapman with the sneer  
 At my rank methods, and the savage trick  
 Of choking genius with a tag severe  
 Of learning : all his rugged verses click  
 Of rusty nail and hammer : Learned fool,  
 Say, is not power the hand, and lore the tool ?  
 Did books forge brains, or brains build  
     books ? I swear

Thou art a pedant, wilt a pedant die—  
Thou, fitted less for verse than carpentry,  
For all thou sittest in the censor's chair.

And thou, smug Spenser, that dost trim and  
twine  
With spider patience till thy verses scan  
Like beads of silver strung in measured line,  
Thou art, I fear me, but a charlatan :  
What, thou the monarch of the sylvan lay,  
Thou, tireless gilder, tuneful popinjay,  
That ne'er hast heard the dappled thrush  
rehearse  
His early love-song, never didst acquire  
The art that sets brown Gillian's cheek afire ?  
Poor poetaster, bloodless as thy verse !

And thou, deep rival, that across the board  
With mystic smile dost scan me, thou that  
still,  
Though interchanging, to thy golden hoard  
Art slily adding, Straftord's subtle Will,  
I cannot scorn thee, for I know thy power ;  
I do not dread thee, yet in secret hour  
My better angel softly whispers me,  
"Bend thy strong sinews to the race begun,  
Or yon calm wizard will thy speed outrun,  
And clasp the laurel that should garland  
thee !"

Then do I fashion resolutions stern  
 Of what fools call amendment, would forego  
 The hazard of the tables, would unlearn  
 The lore of Aphrodite, even throw  
 The wine-cup from me, cast no longing look  
 To where it falleth, and by Wisdom's book  
 Would order all my goings, till I frame  
 Some haughty epic that shall still straightway  
 The tongues that cavil, or some wondrous  
     play  
 That shall secure me everlasting fame.

Then rings the music of the rattling dice  
 On oaken settle, or a buxom lass  
 Rains smiles upon me, or the darling vice  
 Allures from cincture of a purpled glass,  
 And brief deprival for each honeyed sin  
 A sweeter relish than of old doth win :  
 Sure, broad Avernus doth with magic teem  
 Of scented roses and of bubbling wine,  
 And wine and roses to this heart of mine  
 Do fairer toys than figured laurel seem.

And further, when such lapses fugitive  
 I make into cold wisdom, and address  
 Myself unto the Muses, as I live,  
 I find me impotent : sheer barrenness  
 Doth clasp my spirit : Fancy's rippling flood  
 Ebbs dry, and lo, rank weeds and foulest mud !

My teasels in the hedgerow must remain  
Or wither : outcast garlands such as mine  
Must blossom vagrant, or to dust decline :  
The which doth prove all reformation vain.

Indeed, this Jack-o'-Lantern gift I own  
May foul me yet, for oftentime it takes  
Me into pathways by the gods unknown,  
And leaves me wildered, playing ducks and  
drakes  
With sounding phrases on the pools of  
Naught,  
And then some people of the learned sort  
Do me mistake for other than I am,  
Nor see that, even in such mood unfit,  
Mad Marlowe's method closer gains to wit  
Than all their monotone of epigram.

By this fair light, an I could have my way :  
Oh, blithe conceit ! On bungless cask astride,  
And straw-begarlanded, the livelong day—  
Red Doll and tawny Joan at my side—  
Through London town I would in triumph go,  
And at my heels a gallimaufry tow  
Of clowns and bearherds, cudgellers and  
mimes,  
Full-cheeked extorters of the bagpipe's drone,  
Deft knights of cleaver and of marrowbone,  
And rascal jongleurs, chanting ragged rhymes.



And, when the lordly tapers were aglow  
 At the great conclave, I would swagger in,  
 Confront the Masters seated there arow,  
 The dainty Edmund with his tufted chin,  
 Grim Chapman, leaning on his knotted palm,  
 And that dread rival with the aspect calm ;  
 Then would I bluster in the censor's seat,  
 And such keen matter to their souls convey,  
 In mine own random and peculiar way,  
 As brings conviction sudden and complete.

As thus : " My masters, ye be men of lore,  
 Each in his own fond fashion, and ye hope,  
 Each in good time, that is to say, afore  
 The others, up the green Parnassian slope  
 To win a way : good Masters, I must own  
 Few bards would lord it on the laurelled throne  
 With better grace or reason, yet I pray  
 Your worships' patience while Kit Marlowe  
       proves  
 Than that steep rut in which your wisdom  
       moves  
 There is a nearer and a nobler way.

" For, over and against the classic knoll,  
 I do the shoulder of a mountain see,  
 A dismal scarp, where many a gallant soul  
 Lies chained and moaning in much misery,  
 Aghast yet hopeful : a disdainous hag  
 Hath foul dominion o'er that hellish crag,

And holds the key of each poor captive's  
brain :

She ne'er unlocks but to bestow therein  
Most maniac mischief, seed of frantic sin,  
Wild follies, dread delusions, thoughts insane.

“Betwixt Parnassus and the Hill of Woe  
But space abideth of a squirrel's bound :  
A thread doth bridge it, and the gulf below ?  
No sight extendeth to its black profound ;  
Yet o'er that fissure shall the gods' elect  
By Genius guided, radiant and erect,  
Pass to his bourne, and don the regal bays :  
Sure, he that winneth o'er that narrow way  
Must by the gods be beckoned : Masters,  
say,  
What reck's such traveller of your keen dis-  
praise ?

“And now, good audience, speechless in the  
pews ?  
Stout Chapman, thou that with thy rumbling  
lines  
Canst shake the spheres, and thou, whose  
painted Muse  
To curd and cowslips for a fee inclines :  
What, silent and bestaggered both ? And  
thou,  
Whose toils have chafed the plumage from  
thy brow ?

Thou sayest nothing, yet thou listenest well :  
It hath been whispered thou hast stolen  
deer ;

Steal nothing uttered by a madman here,  
Lest I the secret of thy fame foretell.

“Lest in the future, when thy works have  
grown

A wonder to the nations, some that strive  
To go beyond their tether, of his own  
By foolish practice would the Seer deprive,  
And with the token of the forger's crime  
Endow forever his pale front sublime :  
Such eager flaunters of their wit shall be  
(Opines one Marlowe that is mad) most  
fain

To sift the weavings of the bigger brain  
In that full future that awaiteth thee.”

Ho, ho ! I wonder if yon plumèd jay,  
That like a bailiff flitteth in my track,  
Will to his fellows, in his rascal way,  
Recite my ravings ? An he doth, alack,  
Short shrift to his tail-feathers : savage  
beaks

Shall pluck and mangle when his part he  
speaks :

These azured glozers have their learned  
schools

Remote and regnant in some withered tree,  
And each pert coxcomb shall a critic be :  
Alack, the world is deadly full of fools !

“ Kr-rah ! Kr-rah ! ” Much triumph in that  
note !

He hath it, garnered in his jaunty pate !  
Well, there be others of a plainer coat,  
And one wise hoarder steadfastly shall wait  
Till I am dead, then tangle and displace  
With wizard cunning, subtly interlace  
My virgin sprigs with sprays divinely wove :  
A world of starers shall acclaim the feat,  
And then ? The laurel, and a starry seat  
Blind Homer and the Mantuan above.

Heigho ! The throstle's strain from yonder  
dell

Bears magic in its burden : crystal dew  
Survives sun-spangled in the cowslip's bell :  
The sylvan county that I travel through  
Beguiles with vistas of its spacious Weald,  
And this my partner sundry threads may yield  
For Fancy's shuttle, from his dwindling load,  
And when his burden to the dregs is quaffed  
He shall be plenished with an English draught :  
Good ale is plenty on the London road.

## HERRICK'S SECRET

(1624)

THAT beldame, tramping through the snow,  
what did she say, six months ago?  
She held my hand, she scanned the lines :  
"Take heed, or love will work you woe :  
Think, when there comes at April dawn a  
dark man through the lanes of thorn,  
It is most true, though most forlorn, that  
thorns amid white roses grow.

"Take heed, young damsel unafraid, for  
sweethearts is a parlous trade :  
Your locks show ruddy 'mid the brown, the  
sun finds gold in every braid,  
Bright crimson mantles in your blood, i'faith,  
you be of ardent mood :  
The dark man may not mean you good, take  
care, nor stumble, pretty maid."

I wonder, as I went this morn along the  
flowering lanes of thorn,  
What thought he, that dark cavalier who eyed  
me with a glance forlorn ?

He is not old, he is not young, and, faith, he  
must be slow of tongue :

So sad a swain can mean no wrong : the  
gypsy is a liar born.

I deemed he might have spoken when I passed  
him near the linden glen :

A smile crept round his lips and eyne : such  
dullards be these modest men !

A word were better than a smile : what said  
the beldame full of guile ?

Pish, I be past my teens awhile, and might  
have sweethearts nine or ten.

Perchance he thinks me but some green young  
daughter of a village quean,

And that to say " Good-morrow, maid," Sir  
Cavalier might much bemean :

My heart, Sir Cavalier shall stare when I my  
feathered beaver wear,

My jewelled ruff and stomacher, my tresses  
touched with bandoline.

What said that beldame tall and strong ?  
" Take heed, blithe maid, thou art but  
young,

Oh, look not in the dark man's eye, for it  
may end in dole and wrong ! "

I'faith, if I be young and weak I should some  
stout protection seek :

Oh, that the dark man would but speak : God  
help Sir Silent to a tongue !

So it were that I could define the courses that  
my years should run,  
I would yon house of the whelming vine, its  
gardens and its fields were mine,  
Its terraced spaces broad and fine, its meadows  
waving 'neath the sun.

So I could a comelier fate declare, of amorous  
converse what would I ?  
I would yon maid with the auburn hair, my  
pleasures and my toils to share,  
To make me blithe beyond compare, and love  
me till I come to die.

Your frills, young maid, they were all askew,  
your scarlet slippers down at heel ;  
The leaves had shed bright tears of dew on  
that old gown of dappled blue  
That fitted your fine shape so true, sweet  
country maid in deshabelle.

What thought had lured you from your  
white bed in that fair chamber 'neath  
the vine,  
And your swift steps by the lindens led, to  
fill with dreams this learned head,  
And plant the Paphian arrow dread in this  
reluctant heart of mine ?

For you have reached but the fifth bright  
 teen, your April is not yet half-blown :  
 Sport not with love in your girlhood green,  
     for what the pleasant game may mean,  
 How deadly dire its forfeits keen, you yet,  
     methinks, have nothing known.

When first in shadow of linden glade I viewed  
     thee pass thy chamber fro,  
 Had my struck heart its pangs betrayed, what  
     wouldst thou in thy shame have said ?  
 Methinks my sweet had been dismayed : 'tis  
     better far it was not so.

Yet come thou still from the trellised court,  
     and pass thou still by the bowering tree :  
 I will not harm thee in deed or thought :  
     pass, rosy flutterer, still uncaught :  
 Such wile were sin of deadliest sort, yet pass  
     thou still, to comfort me !

Oh, thou, that dost thy wandering swain  
     allure  
 To vigils weary as the nights be long,  
 No more of hindrance may hot love endure :  
 Nay, thou shalt listen, and perpend my  
     wrong.



Why did I woo thee, when fond hope did seem,  
Of such sweet favour, fool-wrought fantasy  
Vague and misguideful as an idiot dream ?  
Alack, I know not, save it was to be.

How sore my sorrows ? Such the biting pain,  
Words may not tell it, but the leech shall  
    know  
Whose keen knife passeth through dead bone  
    and vein :  
The heart all bloodless—the wan heart will  
    show.

How deep my love ? Christ's blood, 'twere  
    wondrous skill  
To know this urgent fever of the mind,  
That sinks and rallies, yet can ne'er lie still,  
For love or madness, or the twain combined.

What saith my lady, standing there apart,  
My soul's enchantress, fair exceedingly,  
Remote tormentor of a steadfast heart,  
What saith my lady to poor listening me ?

Sad swain, content thee, nor my faith indict,  
But think thou kindly on the sweet times gone :  
Oft have I stolen to thee in the night :  
Are my stray kisses from thy hot lips flown ?

My kinsmen, steadfast in their clownish pride,  
Would slay thee, lurker in the lanes of thorn,  
Yet I did meet thee at the covert side :  
An thou forgettest, sure thou art forsworn.

Though oft in durance I may bide afar,  
While thou dost errant in the darkness roam,  
The deep thought dwelleth on the distant star ;  
My soul dreams of thee and blithe hours to  
    come.

Still lurk thou, sweetheart, in the leavy glade :  
The hour most lonely may the best hour be,  
The hour when, urgent of the bliss delayed,  
I yield me captive to the night and thee.

Thus spake the bell that, from the steeple  
    tolling,  
In iterance mournful to my soul appealed ;  
The dolorous bell, in urgent measure knolling,  
To my sad spirit thus its strain revealed :  
    “ Dead !   Dead !   Love lies dead !

“ Sigh not for stately sire and gentle mother,  
By Death's cold talons strangled in their prime,  
Mourn ye no more for him, the comely brother,  
Weep for the maiden dead before her time :  
    Gone !   Gone !   Cold as stone !

“ Her smile was like the look divine that  
    lingers  
On seraph faces, master-limned of yore,  
Her warm young heart, now prize of Death's  
    cold fingers,  
Was pure red love from rim to tender core :  
    Dead and gone !   Dead and gone !

“ In lily chains the loving hands have bound her,  
In stainless shroud her snowy limbs comprest,  
But, ah, to tie the ruddy girdle round her,  
And pin the rosebud on her marbled breast :  
    Would it were so !   Would it were so !

“ The girdle red, the blood-red roselet peeping  
From its green cincture, argument implied  
That she, whose going drowned all eyes in  
    weeping,  
Had blessed her lover ere she drooped and  
    died :  
    Then all were well : ” thus spake the bell.

If any other in such misery go  
As mine, God help him, ere he droop, and grow  
Sick, sick of life, and eager of the doom  
Oblivious ; through the narrow ways of grief  
But my base body holdeth circuit brief ;  
My soul lies locked with Doris in the tomb.

Ware ye the colour that doth come and go  
As gleams the waning sunlight on the snow ;  
Death lurks in ambush of the cypress near :  
Thus glowed her father, stately as the pine,  
Her beauteous mother with the brow benign,  
Her brother, stalwart as the harnessed steer.

Than her cheeks' glory never a rose of fame  
In Persian garden with a redder flame  
Burned, lit by sun-lance through green arbour  
thrust :  
Sire, dame, and brother, from the rich stalk  
reft—  
Not one bright blossom of the cluster left :  
Alack, the grim gods, and their righteous lust!

Vile nettles flourish in foul corners still,  
The dwarf crab prospers on the sedgy hill,  
The thistle tarries, long endures the weed,  
But all rich products and all things of worth  
Have brief survival on this sinful earth :  
Thus in their wisdom have the gods decreed.

Full soon the only green shall be of holly :  
Would it were spring, and I a pilgrim jolly  
In lanes with thorny splendours overflown ;  
Would it were May, the first of Spring's sweet  
waning,

And lark and thrush their dappled bosoms  
    straining  
To soothe my spirit as I walk alone.

The bonny thrush, that singeth as a lover,  
While his meek mate, afar in brambly cover,  
Four fruits of love in her warm wings doth  
    fold,  
Would it were with me as with that bold  
    sweeting,  
To spend my summer in the fond entreating  
Of her who loved me in the days of old !

Soon shall grey Winter's tempests strong and  
    savage  
The bleak hills scour, the withered woodlands  
    ravage,  
Yet Spring's mild rains their splendours shall  
    restore,  
Warm downy breasts with love's soft joys be  
    shaken,  
Chilled turf and twig in glories green awaken,  
But that fond transport shall be mine no  
    more.

Alack, the trouble ! Ah, the weary linking  
Of woe and fancy, that do come by thinking  
The old thoughts over, the old times upon,  
The rosy visions that awake to perish,  
Poor phantom flowerings of the grief I cherish  
For that sweet mistress who is dead and gone !

Young maid, that didst with many a token  
tender

Thy heart's rich bounty to my search surrender,  
And tune my senses to delights serene,  
The cold earth heaped beside the drooping  
willow

Is thy dank tent, the oozy clay thy pillow,  
Thy tablet captive of the ivy green.

Now all fond tokens of love's rosy glamour  
In other maids, that other swains enamour,  
My soul renounceth, aye and evermore :  
For me the byways and green alleys only,  
There walk I ever as a muser lonely,  
And feed my fancies with the dreams of yore.

An I were done with tears and laughter, and  
with the classic-laurelled She,  
What would a fit and blithe hereafter for my  
fond bosom's captive be ?  
Stout faith is mine the cold black river, that  
drowns the dullard's soul forever,  
In its drear flood's embraces never shall overwhelm  
and swallow the soul of me.

This something quick that burns within me  
for lofty joys would little care,  
And God's sweet grace shall freedom win me  
from such foul pains as devils share :

I mind me of the learned Roman : a few  
sharp blows at lurking foemen—

A few sweet slips with wine and woman—one  
poor Peccavi quittance were.

Not mine the rabble's meed of glory : I would  
not, faith, that man might know

My place of rest, save delvers hoary, the  
foster-mates of long ago :

So deep my grave the roots between of ancient  
alders stout and green

That it shall aye endure unseen of him that  
passeth to and fro.

And good it were my wayward spirit, when  
sextons twain had prayed and gone,

Its mouldering casket might inherit, should  
rest and utter silence own,

Till flesh to shroud and bone to clay were  
welded close by calm Decay,

That knitter slow by night and day, and all  
dead items were as one.

That then, some April morn unclouded, when  
Joy was queen of land and sea,

The maid so long with mould enshrouded  
should spectral come and call to me,

“Why sleepest thou, my love, so long, the  
clods and rushes dank among ?

Arise, the throstle is in song : arise, thy Doris  
waiteth thee ! ”

And if the cruel Fates should shiver with  
sudden stroke the links of yore,  
And break our tryst beside the river, when  
that fond day of love was o'er,  
Methinks her soul might peaceful lie for aye  
the brooding willows by,  
And mine the stream of darkness nigh, for  
ever and for evermore.



## THE LEVELLER

(1652)

IN glade remote of greenwood olden, long  
miles away from road and town,  
When wheat is sere and barley golden, and  
Sol hath burned the pastures brown,  
Most sweet it is to walk, when dyes the  
splendour of the western skies.

Tall elm and beech, the white birch limber,  
the ash thick hung with golden keys,  
The sturdy oak, stout lord of timber, the  
goodly glade is rich in these,  
But the dark yew is king enorm, whence fork  
the alleys cruciform.

Foul waifs of crime its dark boughs cover—  
vile brigands all of earth and sky—  
The bloody stoat and keen windhover, the  
cruel shrike and faithless pie,  
Rat, mouldwarp, vixen, owl, and jay, hang  
black and stark on trunk and spray.

When Luna's beams the sward bespangle,  
and dew drips fast from frond and tree,  
The rides that from the lone yew angle be  
four long lanes of gramarye,  
The golden light such glory weaves with  
ghostly trunks and tangled leaves.

Then as I go I sadly ponder the mystery of  
that sombre tree :  
"Oh, cursèd caitiffs hanging yonder," I cry,  
"your hellish cruelty  
At last hath gained fit punishment, but they,  
so foully slain and rent ?

"Blithe acolytes of Dawn's red wicket, fond  
troubadours of bush and bough,  
Sweet choristers of glade and thicket, the  
world was fain of them, I trow :  
Nought can restore to woods and banks their  
tuneful sleights and gentle pranks."

When peers the dawn through mist and  
shadow, and fade the stars in quickening  
blue,  
When white webs garland spray and meadow,  
and sings the wren from boughs of yew,  
No tears of loving Night are seen on those  
black spots amid the green !

When mist and shadow in the west retreat,  
And teems the orient with ensanguined glow,  
I find the village of the terraced street,  
Quaint past comparing, gloriously replete  
With rustic graces of the long ago.

Its bordering downs in vernal months be rife  
Of daisied splendour and the skylark's glee ;  
No traffic meddles with its drowsy life,  
No hint of turmoil, save the distant strife  
And shoreward clamour of the sunlit sea.

Its gabled cots their reverend brows obtrude  
From hoods of ivy, and the windmill tall  
Wheels mid the cloudlets, and the shorings  
rude  
Of wall and gateway be of jetsam wood—  
Black oak of Eld, and quaintly carven all.

Its hoary turret on the crowning steep  
Is ivy-drapen, battlement to sill,  
And decked with angels that forever weep  
Great stony tears for victims of the deep—  
The deep relentless and insatiate still.

Rich-dowered its nave with many a foreword  
blest  
Of sweet forgiveness and immortal balms—  
Celestial drops on Calvary expressed—  
—Bright crowns of victory, and eternal rest  
In Abram's bosom or Immanuel's arms.

The comely haven called the Bell looks west-  
ward with an aspect brave :  
From its rose-cinctured oriel I gaze afar o'er  
strand and wave :  
Dark be its rooms, the curtains cloak deep  
mullions wrought in strange design ;  
Dark be the pictures framed in oak : no man  
their meaning may divine.

Mine host is one of limb immense and stately  
paunch ; his features red  
Glow moon-round, radiant evidence of health  
and peaceful nights abed :  
Plump worthies, sodden of repose, o' nights  
keep with him festival,  
Ripe ancients and of ruby nose, sound, sturdy  
cogers, one and all.

And shake their sides with thunderous glee  
mine host and guests, a cosy ring  
In parlour lit with tapers three, while loud  
the western gale doth sing :  
The senior with the rheumy eye his story tells  
of wondrous span,  
With " I said," " He said," and " Said I," and  
ends him where his tale began.

I have a chamber in this tavern rare,  
The downy pillows reek of lavender,  
The window opens on the briny west :

Each summer's morning yields my slumber  
fair

To sweet incursions of the upland air,  
And wayward carols from the swallow's breast.

The goodly garden is a furlong wide,  
With bedded flowerets primly beautified,  
And rich the scent of wall-embowering rose,  
Huge be the thick-hedged mazes, where abide  
In unexpected spots on every side  
Warm woodbined nooks, blest arbours of  
repose.

Yon dell deep witchery for my senses  
spins ;

"Come, come," it murmurs, "man of many  
sins,

Come, know my bounties, and thy youth  
renew !"

Afar its bosom the vast upland heaves,  
With one broad cleft through which the eye  
perceives

A faery sail, becalmed in tranquil blue.

Yet must my soul with penitence confess  
Some sour reminder of stale weariness  
Intrudeth ever, as through rosiest dream  
The grey ghost stalketh : still the old distress,  
Though sky and summer bounteously express  
What should be solace endless and supreme !

Oh, Mistress Nature, in thine every kiss  
Some tang of sorrow doth pervade the bliss  
My drouthy spirit would unstinted know :  
In highest transport something is amiss,  
In fields Elysian I should find, I wis,  
Some element provocative of woe.

What would I, wistful, of the brawling town ?  
Brave hearts I cherished, basely stricken down,  
Stout souls defeated, much beloved of me,  
Wise men and true men, by unfeeling knaves  
Despoiled, and treated as desertless slaves :  
Would ye were with me : happy I could be !

When I sit musing by yon windmill tall,  
Or by the beacon on the breezy hill,  
Right glorious visions do my soul enthral :  
The old fond cravings tarry with me still.

Christ's wounds, the rapture of that youthful  
prime,  
When straight and sunlit did the pathway lie  
For my stout footsteps, and the goal sublime  
Seemed wondrous radiant and exceeding nigh !

Then comes a whisper penetrant and strong :  
"Relinquish not thy soaring soul's desire :  
Not endless be the weary ways of wrong  
That thy bold purpose hinder and bemire :

“Though clouds thy strivings baffle and  
obscure,  
Though turn and quit thee many of thy  
friends,  
Still not for ever shall ill luck endure :  
The Right shall conquer : Time will make  
amends !”

To that rich end of my fondest scheming,  
That noble muster that still may be,  
When the barns be full, and the orchards  
teeming,  
And homeward saileth the argosy,  
Say, who shall come, with no denial,  
The wreath to wear, and tune the viol,  
And taste the banquet, the goodly banquet,  
A world enraptured shall set for me ?

The steadfast souls that did once attend me  
And my poor thankings full bounty deem,  
The silent sworders that did befriend me  
In stress of combat and plight extreme,  
The good stout foes whom, half in sorrow,  
I struck to earth, and yet the morrow  
Locked hands and laughed with, clinked cup  
and quaffed with,  
Such guests would surely my halls beseem !

Ay, these shall sit at the table's border :  
What joyful service shall then be mine ?  
But to trim the lamps, and the trenchers order,  
To carve the capon, and serve the wine :  
Thus will I toil, in very seeming  
Of humblest groom, the while all deeming  
Some broidered stranger the feast's arranger,  
Some errant masquer the host benign.

The vine of Luck is of all men's training,  
Though he who gathers small toil hath known ;  
All rule o'er man is of men's sustaining ;  
The peasant's shoulder upbears the throne :  
Then open wide your heart's rich portals,  
Ye kings of men, that fellow mortals  
May taste, unknowing, their hands' bestowing,  
And reap as bounty what is their own.



## COBBETT'S GRANDSIRE

(1726)

FROST in the furrow, darkness in the sky,  
Harsh wind across the moorland ; to and fro  
In the keen air the ragged waifs of snow  
Like morris-dancers travel ; stark and dry  
Black Gilbert's relics in their cage on high  
From the bleak gibbet dangle evermo.

Thus saith the Ruler : " Darkness, want, and  
cold  
For thee, worn wrestler with the hungry soil,  
For thee, chained shearer of the golden spoil,  
And if, in some mad season overbold,  
Thou wouldst avenge thee, the dire snake of  
old  
Shall crush thy body in his deadly coil.

" Conceived in bondage, peasant-bred-and-  
born,  
Cold-nurtured and mishandled, thou didst grow  
To be my chattel, doomed to delve and sow

And reap, yet, reaping, stand aloof forlorn  
From the full garner, sleep until the morn,  
And yet again unto thy delving go."

Avaunt, old Tyrant ! Though some truth  
    may hold  
In thy stern mandate, there be precious strains  
Of full salvation in remoter veins  
Than thou canst search : when skies are black  
    and cold  
Brown bread and bacon relish, and the old  
Heart's-blood of barley double virtue gains.

What though my lordly masters may me  
    deem  
A dullard lout ? The fruit of Mary born  
By haughty Pharisees was held in scorn :  
To fleering fools all folk of virtue seem,  
The more their value, of the less esteem :  
The bungler prospers, and the knave forsworn.

Ay, I have treasures gold can never buy,  
Nor rank be sure of, appetite complete  
And labour-sharpened ; thus the grainy meat  
From the hog's jowl to me is savoury ;  
Keen thirst, that makes the tongue grow  
    desert-dry,  
And the sour apple's vintage nectar-sweet.

And as my training was so wondrous bare  
Of ease and shelter, love with me is strong :  
My youth knew nothing of the leprous wrong :  
My hours of rapture are exceeding rare :  
Love greets me seldom, yet be well aware  
He comes full-handed, and he tarries long.

Thus rosy Gillian doth my powers attest,  
And our poor cradle with love's treasures fill :  
She, turned of forty, is my sweetheart still,  
My lureful partner with the gracious breast,  
That crooneth blithely o'er her teeming nest,  
"It was to be, love : it is God's good will!"<sup>1</sup>

And when old Curfew hath a warning cried,  
When fades the rushlight, and the fire is low,  
A brooding angel taketh me in tow,  
And lulls my cares at drowsy Gillian's side :  
No richer bounty doth the Lord provide  
Than the sweet slumber His poor people know.

When my pale Ruler on his downy bed  
At daybreak strives to win the sleep denied  
Through hours of darkness, what doth me  
betide?

I hear the brown lark carol overhead :  
No palace owns' such carpets as I tread—  
The meads with God's own jewels beautified.

<sup>1</sup> The favourite answer of the old peasantry, when reproached by Malthusians, was, "It is the will of God."

The townsmen marvel at my language strange,  
Yet in my rugged method lies enrolled  
The good pure English of the days of  
old,  
For I am one that doth not quickly change :  
I hoard the title of each hill and grange  
As misers clutch imperilled bags of gold.

And I am pregnant of devices rare  
That do not work for evil, I have skill  
For Nature's chattels duly to fulfil  
Each necessary office, I prepare  
The path of Comfort with exceeding care :  
Such is my mission : it is God's good will.

And mark ye, masters, though my very  
reins  
Be wrung with labour, I am wondrous  
hale,<sup>1</sup>  
Can bear huge burdens, swing a tireless  
flail,  
And toss fat sheaves upon the loaded wains :  
God willed it thus : when strength no more  
remains  
With her brown peasants, England's power  
shall fail.

<sup>1</sup> "The Common People" (of England) "will endure long and hard Labour ; insomuch that after 12 Hours' hard Work they will go in the Evening to Football, Stoolball, Cricket, Prison-base, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, or some such like vehement Exercise, for their Recreation."—*Chamberlayne*, 1727.

I am no dolt, but with my knotted stick  
Can foil a sworder, and with trip of toe  
Can lay the best man of a city low :  
All sleights of fence, and every heave and click  
Of wrestler's science, every manful trick,  
Doth stout old England to her peasants owe.

I am no coward : many a cup to brink  
With War's red mischief loaded (and for  
what?  
That thieves in safety may the spoils allot  
Of my stern valour) to the dregs I drink :  
Say, doth the peasant at the potion blink?  
Who says it is a liar misbegot.

What then, my lords ? Your humble servant  
sees  
His lean bent carcase and its works abound  
In such fair uses as may not be found  
'Mong folk who flourish titles and degrees :  
So cheap his blood, so strong his services,  
He comes to think he makes the world go  
round.

And still he whines not, nor makes tawdry  
show  
Of his staunch merits, does not go abroad,  
His tabard glowing with the schemer's gaud,  
And prating ever, that the world may know,  
"Lo, I am he that hath done so-and-so,"  
(Some foolish feat) "and where is my reward ?"

Anan ? Your worships would your wits  
review,

Some little to requite me ? Masters, pray  
Be not too hasty, but, some empty day,  
When ye are tired of twisting all askew  
The State's trim branches, there be things a few,  
And your poor servant will for ever pray.

And first, yon kind of meddling Puritan  
Without old Noll's long sword, that doth  
repine

Against the grape because it yieldeth wine,  
And our tall Maypole with much malice scan,  
I pray you, drive afar that meddling man  
Who would heap sadness upon me and mine.

For, look ye, masters, though the grape's rich  
leaven

Be not my portion, ale is dear to me :  
With ale to cheer me, I perform with glee  
My hard endeavours, and yon forty-seven-  
-Foot pole flower - wreathed hath pointed  
straight to Heaven

Since God knows when, that knoweth more  
than we.

Yon louring pedant with the gouty knees  
And flaming face hath had it long in thought  
To fence the green to which my sons resort  
To leap and wrestle ; good my masters, please  
Deprive him of his devil's dignities :  
He means me mischief of a deadly sort.

For it is ever yon vile meddler's way  
With cold contrivance and foul quibblery  
To girdle aught that practice maketh free :  
The poor's poor havings are the lawyer's  
prey,  
The fair broad common and the right of  
way  
His lore transmuteth to a golden fee.

Remember, in the dividend of yore  
Mine was a paltry portion ; it hath grown  
Much meaner since—this trifle small alone  
To my poor credit still is carried o'er—  
By Heaven, if ye pare the balance more,  
I shall have nothing I can call mine own !

In sooth, your lordships, though you have a  
knack  
That galls the withers, more than I can tell  
Have I adored you, you that bear the bell  
So bravely, riding on my rounded back :  
I would esteem might tarry, but, alack,  
Your trusted minions do not mean me well.

And every rogue that cometh with a scheme  
That tends to pillage in some slight degree  
May have consideration, and make free,  
As doth your mouser with the bowl of cream,  
With my poor treasures, while your worships  
deem  
The same foul mischief doth advantage me.

Some few tricks other, in your moods austere,  
Your wit plays with me : I must bear me so,  
With naked noddle, when your lordships go  
In glory past me, and your vengeance fear  
If one stray arrow at the browsing deer  
I launch at midnight from my father's bow.

But chiefly doth memorialist bewail  
Your skill in misdirection, when the mood  
Of bounty takes you, and you sour his blood  
With childish books, and sermons wondrous  
stale,  
The while you turn his treasured cup of ale  
Fair upside down, for your poor servant's good.

Sure, if there ever doth pervade your dreams  
A vision charitable, it should be  
Such bounty as will suit the whims of *me*—  
Of such poor sort as your poor slave *esteems*—  
Faith, other than the thing he craveth seems  
But stones for bread, sour whey for eau-de-vie!

Alack, my masters, angered to the vein  
That your sad suitor doth his woes relate,  
And yet—"Some secret bounty shall await  
His poor petition?" It were worse than vain  
To press you further, but the Lord restrain  
Such bitter bounty as you contemplate!



Your slave withdraweth, and your usance keen  
Enshrineth in remembrance : Jesu grant  
That no new meddlers may your reign supplant !  
Better to drudge it to the end, I ween,  
With the calm devil that so long hath been,  
Than ten weak devils madly ministrant !

The night falls swiftly, o'er the countryside  
The black North screeches : God's good care  
betide

Poor souls seafaring, wanderers in the snow :  
God help the shepherd and his huddling flock,  
God guard the trader from the beetling rock,  
God guide Jack Smuggler with his tubs in tow !

God free old England from devices base  
Of such as traffic liberty for place,  
(Foul leering lawyers, rulers infidel)  
And, should His wisdom further grant relief,  
Be they accounted creditors-in-chief—  
The good stout churls who serve the Lord so  
well !

Now hie thee, briskly, to the haven sweet  
Where Gillian waiteth with her brood to greet  
The goodman coming from his toil afar :  
Frost in the furrow, tempest overhead,  
White drift to windward, yet a finger red  
Doth beckon blithely from the door ajar.

## TO THE WILDERNESS

(1826)

IN this bare garret grime-befouled and grey  
An idiot bondage doth my soul enthrall,  
Self-chained I linger, doleful day by day,  
Forlornest drudge and veriest slave of all.

Ah, bitter gleaning of the musty tomes :  
Ah, bootless ploughing of the furrows dry !  
Yon hoary beetle that at leisure roams  
The crumbled ceiling, happier is than I.

The quick dust stirreth on the bindings brown,  
Dull vision teemeth with the circling mote,  
The book-moth dwelleth in my curled crown,  
I taste dead Caxton in my fevered throat.

Still books and books, and worser books again,  
And books shall come hereafter, worse and  
worse :

A curse on books—on they who would by men  
For them be honoured, still a deeper curse !

Our noble fathers made the mystic cross  
At foot of quittance, yet were bold and sage :  
They had no learning, and they knew no loss :  
Had I been tenant of that golden age—

—Behold me coursing with uplifted eyes,  
And wind-stirred lovelocks, o'er the rolling  
    mead,  
My falcon swooping from the sunlit skies :  
Sure, that were wisdom—that were lore indeed !

Behold me monarch of the midland wood,  
My lair a corner of the clefted dene,  
My whittle ruddy with the fallow's blood,  
My yeomen gallant in the Lincoln green.

Behold me—Dotard, that dost weave inane  
Sick dreams to fool thee, as the prisoned fly  
With bruised wing drummeth on the viewless  
    pane,  
The open door of airy egress nigh !

I sat in bondage of a sleepless spell  
Beside the casement, till the monster bell  
With clang sonorous struck the hour of one.

Above, the blue was thick with golden eyes  
That seemed to watch me, in the lower skies  
Through anchored cloudlets ghostly Luna  
    shone.

Beyond the angle of the shadowed quoin  
A figure flitted, tall, and lank of loin,  
With black locks floating, though the air was  
calm,

Stood peering upward, closer did advance,  
Then leaped and gambolled in an eerie dance,  
With circling footsteps and with beckoning  
arm.

And, as with giddy movement and career  
It ran and bounded in the moonglow clear,  
The whirling and the posturing did beget

Strange sounds and courses in my gladdened  
brain,  
Strong chords melodious, and a swift refrain  
Of tambourine and clicking castanet.

And still that figure with the long black hair  
Loose floating, and the lambent eyes astare  
In the wan moonlight, steadfast signalled me

With gleeful gestures, and to my grey soul  
Like sea-spent swallows lureful whispers  
stole—  
Strange tokens, spun of gypsy gramarye.

*“ These shall be thine, the joys of sky and air,  
Of day and night, of upland and of glade,  
The headlong gallop through the roaring fair,  
The lit encampment, and the solace rare  
Of stout companion and of buxom maid :  
Blithe is the greenwood !*

*“ The nights autumnal, when his giant wings  
The mad West urges, and the clouds are rolled  
Pell-mell in glory, while the pale moon swings  
To sudden vision, and beneath her flings  
Fleet-travelling glooms, swift splendours manifold :  
Wide is the moorland !*

*“ The bleak wet weather, when in sheer despite  
The moon sinks darkling, whelmed and overflown  
By rack and tempest, and deserted Night  
Goes mad with weeping that she has no light,  
Storm-hooded sitting on her sombre throne :  
Red glows the camp-fire !*

*“ The moonless mornings, harsh and cold and  
dry,  
The rime-hung mornings, when the powdery snow  
Creaks shrill at treading, and the stars seem  
nigh,  
So keen their lustre, and the pallid sky  
Is pregnant earthward of the boreal glow :  
Fleet is the lurcher !*

*" Along the turnpike, and across the lane,  
The patteran windeth, thence adown the glen :  
Wouldst thou win freedom from the grinding pain ?  
Wouldst thou the madness that is nigh restrain ?  
Come forth, and mingle with King Pharaoh's men :  
Right glad the welcome !*

*" Fain be thy sinews for the free career,  
Thy palate waters for the midnight stew,  
Heap thy mad weavings on the embers clear,  
Smite the proud huckster on his knotted ear,  
And hie thee roaming with the gypsy crew :  
King Pharaoh calleth ! "*

And as that figure, signalling again,  
Whirled back to darkness from my dazzled ken,  
The wild strains dwindled, and the spell was  
o'er :

I cast me, giddy, on my lonely bed,  
Yet sleep I could not, for my fevered head  
Was thronged with secrets of the gypsy lore.

*Thus crooked runs the code of Rommany,  
" Cajole the gorgio, but keep steadfast faith  
With gypsy comrades : such as wear the eye  
That twinkling vieweth jovial knavery,  
Throw wide the tent, and beckon them beneath !*

*"The stone-blind pismire lives to work alway :  
What gains the pismire of her foolish toil ?  
'Sweet be her eggs,' bear witness rook and jay :  
The bee stores honey for a winter's day,  
And Brock the badger wallows in the spoil.*

*"'Staunch toil is glory' ; this the wise attest :  
Leave ye such glory for poor folk to come :  
Asquint endure the wizened knave's behest  
That drones such doctrine : ambush warm is best  
In glade convenient : there his chickens roam.*

*"Take ye great pleasure in the comely wife  
And black-browed children, glowing through  
their tan :  
Live free and hardy and in love with life :  
Own but one terror, Death's dissevering knife :  
Dread ye cold Death, who have no fear of man !"*

What sayeth Wisdom? "If thou wilt but wed  
Old Mammon's daughter, rich rewards incline  
Of spacious orchards ruddied overhead,  
And cellars fragrant of the comet wine.

*"Of cloaks of velvet, edged with costly fur,  
Of priceless curios, all of crystal clear,  
Of elm-fringed pastures, and of parks astir  
With scuttling conies and with roaming deer."*

But, beard of Pharaoh, little do I care  
For e'er a pleasure that such schemes provide,  
When I have prospect of a cosy lair  
'Mid rustling grasses at brown Rachel's side :

There is a ballad that the sibyls troll  
'Mid crowding shadows when the fire is low :  
Black is the secret of the gypsy's soul,  
And they who listen shall the secret know.

*" Come, tell my fortune," said the lady fine,  
And thus the dark dame did the tokens spell :  
" If your fool's future lay in hands of mine,  
It were a future that should fit you well.*

*" No broidered pillow for my lady's head,  
No rustling flimsies should my lady wear,  
But rise up groaning from a stubble bed,  
And walk the turnpike with her soft feet bare.*

*" And, for the solace of her sick desire,  
No smooth-faced stroller of the crowded chong,  
But Devil Ishmael for my lady's squire,  
To tame her humours with the snapping thong.*

*" The dust should harbour in her braided crest,  
The hot glare shrivel up her painted skin,  
The cold rain trickle down her padded breast,  
And black frost wither the false heart within.*



*“The staff should bruise her, and the burden  
bow*

*Her thin weak shoulders, and her fare should be  
The poorest portion from the poisoned sow :  
Thus should my lady : all our tribe should see :  
Thus should my lady, if it lay with me !”*

I tracked the mazes of the tiny burn,  
Breast-deep in billows of the rustling fern,  
To where the ruddy and insistent star  
Shone like a signal in the glade afar.

Dark Miriam, buxom as a Moorish queen,  
Her face transfigured in the scarlet sheen,  
Her rom recumbent, with inquiring glance  
From shadowed forelocks savagely askance—

—Two children peering from a couch of  
broom,  
Dark Miriam’s mother with the brow of  
doom,  
Her tresses reaching to her brawny hips,  
The old, old lure-note on her lying lips.

*“Your comely shadow through my dreams did  
go :*

*I viewed your picture in the ember-glow :  
The running water made the tokens three :  
Come, cross my fingers with the silver fee !”*

Sweet Heav'n, they scanned me as the white  
owl glares  
Upon the quarry that his sharp beak tears,  
Then round and round me in the darkness  
stole,  
Like devils charming of a wayward soul !

I own the manner that with ease deludes  
Rogues into comrades, sudden touch can  
gain  
With all the passions and peculiar moods  
Of these dark haunters of the bowering  
woods :  
There lurketh in me of the gypsy strain.

Of all quaint antics and Bohemian trades  
I can the mystery occult divine :  
All outlawed lurkers in the leafy glades,  
All merry mumpers, and all roving blades,  
At earliest speech are bosom friends of mine.

*"Come close," they cry, "tall lad of silver  
tongue :  
Come, sit within, we need a patrico ;  
Most foul the woodland, and the way o'er-  
long,  
The cauldron bubbles, and the night is young :  
Come, harbour with us till we bid ye go !*

*“ Come close, good fortune to the time ye stay :  
Come, harbour, harbour, quit the life forlorn :  
The strain is in ye of that golden day  
When comely Madam in the woods did stray :  
This side the threshold was your grandsire born ! ”*

This one poor relic of a treasured store  
From my grey dungeon yesternight I bore :  
See thou, King Pharaoh, plenty here be found  
To fill the flagon for a double round !

Sure, this rich odour that the pot exhales  
Of leek and chicken tells convincing tales,  
And whose the chickens and the leeks might  
be,  
Ere Miriam pouched 'em, shall not trouble me.

For know, brave members of the filching crew,  
While ye pouch boldly for your midnight stew,  
The rascal gorgio doth his ends obtain  
By trick and trimming and devout chicane.

A health, dark Romans, if my wish were law,  
Your lureful campfires in each bosky shaw  
Should glow at midnight, and the Great  
White Chord<sup>1</sup>  
Have grassy fringes of a furlong broad.

<sup>1</sup> The North Road.

Red star of glory, that hast warmed this  
bowl,

Lodge thy deep magic in the truant's soul :  
Blest zone of darkness, ever from my view  
Shut out the terrors that of old I knew !

## VALEDICTION

WHAT weakling urges that the starry nights  
In woodland wanton with the joyous sprites,  
In meadow peopled with the tripping fays,

Have fled forever, and our souls are borne  
In endless circuit of the streets forlorn?  
Who sings a requiem for the golden days?

Though now no longer amid alleys green  
Brave hearts go riding, and the kisses keen  
Of sun and tempest uncomplaining share,

Though doubts delude us, and by deadly rote  
We learn Life's lesson, in stray hearts remote  
The sylvan secret lingers unaware.

Though Ruin grapples with the nooks of yore,  
Some sudden magic may the same restore,  
The hearths replenish with the olden fires:

Some vagrant wizard may the track pursue,  
The maze unravel, and the spell renew,  
And wake the singing of the vanished quires.

Ah, Christ, for succour of a magic scroll  
And gift of genius, to expend my soul  
In subtle conquest of the ravished string,

On towering viol of the ancient mould,  
In panelled chamber by the Kentish wold,  
Till every rafter to its core should ring !

Awake, loud carols lordly Chanticleer,  
The bells of travel jingle keen and clear,  
The south wind dallies with the Tabard sign :

Our sins be many : what of that ? I trow  
Young April glistens upon sward and bough,  
And, lo, the green path to A'Becket's shrine !

Awake, L'Allegro, and thy glowing eyes  
Upturn in rapture to the vernal skies :  
Rich glamour greets thee of the lengthening  
days :

Blithe England's maidhood has endured thus  
long  
In buxom freshness : lovely still as young,  
Thy youth's enchantress her warm cheek dis-  
plays.

Attend, old Valour doth his spells unchain,  
Hoarse is the murmur of the brooding main  
By the tall headland, plaintively doth yearn

The straining cordage, and the tautened sail  
Sighs loud in labour, whistles wild the gale :  
Deck-deep with treasure Anson doth return.

Unwind, broad magic of the sylvan muse,  
With rural raptures every chord infuse,  
Old Sussex revels in the clasp of Spring,

All green-and-golden is the rolling down,  
The oak is royal with its burgeons brown,  
Afar clear-throated doth the cuckoo sing.

Come, weave in riot ; with its vernal snows  
The thorn is laden, and the woodland rose  
Aflame with sunlight, drenched with lustral  
dew :

The brown bird watches from the shading grass  
Her minstrel gallant circle and repass  
Above her, questing of the boundless blue.

Who wails deprival of the days of gold ?  
As virgin-lovely as in prime of old  
Our Lady signals : lo, the dwarfish yews

Still mark the channel of the Pilgrim's Lane :  
The South still beckons, shall she call in  
vain ?

What narrow pedant prompts ye to refuse ?

Vast Tree of Empire, shallow hirelings say  
The sign is on thee of a swift decay,  
That, foul and secret at thy deepest core,

Dread canker nestles of the worm of doom,  
And thou art barren of the goodly bloom  
Thy olden vigour in such bounty bore.

That they who fondly in this evil time  
Would weave thee garlands of thy wondrous  
prime  
Aloof and haggard with their gifts shall stand,

For their own birthright intercessors vain,  
Thrice-branded outlaws in their own domain,  
Waifs unregarded on their native strand.

It is not so : thy heart is still immune  
Of that grey mischief, and a coming June,  
Instinct with virtues of the South serene,

Shall shape thy blossoms in the primal mould,  
Heap thy broad members with a fruit of gold,  
And dower thy foliage with eternal green !





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